

A Study on Teaching English Pronunciation at Junior High Schools in Japan

Kenta Watanabe

The objective of this thesis is to analyze the needs of pronunciation teaching at junior high schools in Japan. As the English language has spread in the world, learners have asked for more intensive training on their speaking and listening skills. Consequently, the mainstream of the teaching method of English has shifted from grammar-translation to more communicative language teaching. However, a lot of research has pointed out that the teaching of English pronunciation has not changed very much, especially in Japan. In such a situation, what ought to be considered is the proper learning objectives and curriculum. Thus, this thesis carries out a needs analysis, which is the first step to establish a curriculum. The needs are gathered from 4 groups: students, teachers, textbook editors and the government. The needs from the first three groups are examined through questionnaires. The numbers of the participants are 40, 16 and 2 respectively. The need from the government is abstracted from *The Course of Study*, published by the MEXT in place of the government. Even though the sample sizes are not large enough to represent the situation of Japanese school education entirely, it is expected that this research will be significant as a case study. The data from students and teachers are examined with a piece of software, SPSS.

Within the participating students, 12, 12, and 16 of them are in the first, second and third grades at their schools respectively. As the results of the analysis of the data from the students, the following 4 needs were discovered. (1) As those students are quite highly motivated to learn English pronunciation throughout the 3 years at junior high schools, teachers should teach it more. (2) The items taught in the class are mostly segmental phonemes and suprasegmental sounds and students scarcely learn phonetic symbols. (3) The students agree that learning segmental phonemes and suprasegmental sounds is effective in enabling them to pronounce English. (4) As the students notice the effectiveness after sufficient study of pronunciation, they tend to be motivated to learn more.

Next, the participating teachers do not teach each of the segmental

phonemes, suprasegmental sounds and phonetic symbols very intensively. The results of statistical analysis demonstrate 3 needs of teachers. (1) Textbooks and *The Course of Study* should include some guide about what to teach and how to teach it in terms of English pronunciation. (2) The class sizes should be smaller. (3) Textbooks should contain phonetic symbols.

The needs from the textbook editors are abstracted from a survey in free description. The data shows 3 needs from them. (1) Students should follow the steps in the textbooks to learn pronunciation. (2) Teachers should deal with pronunciation more adequately. (3) Teachers are required to acquire intelligible pronunciation and to be alert to the students' errors. On the other hand, the extracted needs from the government are the following 2 points. (1) English classes should take up segmental phonemes and suprasegmental sounds exhaustively. (2) Detailed models and teaching materials should be selected by teachers and textbook editors.

This research reveals the above-mentioned needs from the 4 sources that surround English education at junior high schools. These needs imply the necessity of further research on 2 points. The first one is the question of what sounds should be chosen as learning objectives at junior high schools, from the viewpoint of the gap between Japanese and English. The next one is that there should be criteria for selecting the learning models. Considering the high motivation from the students, more research should be done to provide attainable goals for their learning of pronunciation.